ASSESSMENT OF BUSINESS PROGRAMS: A REVIEW OF TWO MODELS

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ABSTRACT

This article presents two contrasting assessment programs implemented at a small School of Business in the Los Angeles area. The program for the undergraduate degree, which includes four majors, relies upon tight coordination and a centralized assessment group, while the graduate program, an MBA, relies upon individual courses as the key building blocks of the assessment program. This article shows ways in which pre- and post-tests, nationally normed instruments, longitudinal tracking, and cross-sectional analysis can be used to demonstrate effective assessment of learning in each program. Lastly, the article concludes by discussing ways to continually continuously improve a curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a critical issue in higher education today. Colleges and universities are moving to a more formal process of quality improvement that relies upon the entire faculty to decide issues of quality and content (Zemsky, 2011). However, in the transition from individual decision-makers to rigorous systems, the wide range of methods available (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011) can be overwhelming. While a great deal of literature is available, it can be difficult to locate models that compare and contrast the techniques. This paper reviews the implementation of two assessment models that successfully coexist in one small business school. In the graduate MBA program, individual faculty coordinate and assess each learning outcome, and the results compiled and evaluated at the program level. The undergraduate program (a consolidation of four majors) utilizes a core assessment committee and more tightly coordinated learning activities. This paper's goal is to help programs evaluate approaches to assessment through a close examination of a single case study. We begin with a literature review discussing the role of assessment in higher education. This paper then presents an overview of the three techniques used in the graduate assessment program: faculty rubrics, co-teaching with writing faculty, and an externally validated simulation. We then present an overview of the undergraduate program, and discuss how it uses a committee analysis and longitudinal processes to assess learning. The paper then ends by summarizing major lessons learned, study implications, and limitations of our analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher Education is continually being called upon to justify its value. Groups such as the Spellings' Commission (Zemsky, 2011) have been highly critical of colleges' and universities' ability to educate students. Changing landscapes in higher education, such as declining public support and increasing costs (Staley & Trinkle 2011) are forcing colleges to move from a system of *trust* to a system of *evidence*. Assessment is a tool for moving beyond anecdotes and into a rigorous and verifiable system of education.
A wide variety of techniques, surveys, and validated tools exist to measure learning (University of Wisconsin-Madison 2011). These include qualitative measures relying on faculty and student self-assessments, such as the AAC&U LEAP Project's standardized rubrics (Miller & Morgaine, 2009). More

quantitative measures also exist, such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which assesses critical thinking. Disciplinary measures also exist, such as ETS MBA exam.

A good assessment program can significantly improve student learning and outsider perceptions. Assessment best practices require institutions to create formalized assessment processes, externally valid record sets, multiple years of data, a continuous improvement process (Scott & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006). Disciplinary accreditations also demand assessment processes beyond those required by regional accreditations. As an example, Pesta and Sherer confirm that schools seeking the AACSB business accreditation "must develop assessment tools that measure the effectiveness of their curriculum, as outlined in the AACSB assurance of learning standards" (2011, p. 163).

They say that each school has the freedom to determine which type of assessment works best given its policies, procedures, and structures, as long as the assessment is appropriate and consists of direct measures of learning. Many institutions trying to deal with the new demands focus heavily on quantitative measures that scale well. Unfortunately, a heavy emphasis on numerical data makes it more difficult for institutions to be flexible and responsive (Kilpatrick et. al, 2008). A constant tension exists between quantitative measures that are easily comparable and externally verifiable, and qualitative measures that more useful for internal improvement. Many scholars emphasize a process that focuses on improvement and local flexibility (Kelley, Tong, and Choi 2010, Sampson and Betters-Reed 2008, Treleaven and Voola 2008, and Romero 2008, Martell 2007a, & Martell 2007b). Focusing on the distinctiveness of each assessment process, Beard, Schwieger, and Surendran (2008) argue that assessment has to be consistent with an institution's mission, and that it should add to the credibility and continuous improvement of learning and teaching. A number of scholars argue that accreditation measuring and reporting requirements impose an undesirable degree of rigidity and constriction in focus for business schools (Scott and Ofori-Dankwa 2006, and Kilpatrick, Lund Dean and Kilpatrick 2008).

However, other scholars argue that the flexibility dilutes quality (Francisco, Noland, and Sinclair, 2008, and Lowrie and Willmott 2009). Many nationally based improvement efforts, such as "No Child Left Behind," focus heavily on quantitative measures that are easily verified and comparable between schools. Similarly, groups like Spellings' Commission have emphasized the use rigid quantitative approaches as a way of measuring the quality of institutions (Zemsky, 2011). When used properly, assessment processes can improve the quality of learning. When focusing on assessment *for* learning, instead *of* assessment of learning, these techniques have a well-documented impact on learning outcomes (Stiggins, 2002, and Black & Wiliam, 1998). A variety of well-supported formative assessment policies can be shown to increase student outcomes (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, 2004). While the increased focus on assessment has justly increased the pressure on education to be accountable and transparent, it has had the unfortunately impact of making it less flexible (Zemsky, 2011).

For individual schools and colleges working to develop their own assessment programs, the balance between externally valid data, and data useful for improvement in a local context, is difficult. Minimizing faculty overload is a critical. How can assessment *of* learning be balanced with assessment *for* learning? This paper presents the process used by a small school of business during the 2010-2011 academic year. This paper tries to move beyond process-based roadmaps, such as Tillema, Leenknecht, and Segers (2011). Instead of looking at a calendar-based process, we analyze a working process. The case study provides a model of how the different conflicting purposes of assessment can be harmonized. We also show how program differences can lead to different assessment methods. Ultimately, we hope that this case helps address faculty assessment concerns.

Graduate Program Assessment

The graduate MBA program uses an individual faculty level of coordination and analysis, with the results consolidated at the program level. The curriculum consists of 10 core courses and 2 electives. Students may finish the program in a single year by taking a full load of f our courses per semester. The faculty tends to be very stable from term to term. The courses are closely aligned with the program learning outcomes, and most of the courses can be taken in any sequence. The tight integration between Program Learning Objectives, PLOs, and courses in the MBA Program means that it is relatively straightforward to assign each course a primary responsibility for an outcome. Each faculty teaching a core course is responsible for his or her own course assessment. The instructor works on defining the outcome, measuring student pre- and post-tests, assessing benchmark assignments according to defined rubrics, and writes a report each term summarizing student learning and changes made. These reports are then aggregated at the end of each term for archiving and reporting to accreditation agencies. These links are shown in the table below. The table demonstrates the tight integration between outcomes and courses.

Table 1: Primary Assessment Responsibilities for the Graduate Program

Course	**Leadership**	**Communication**	**Ethic**	**Global**	**Integrate**	**Domain-specific**
WMBA 501 Managerial Accounting						X
WMBA 503 Quantitative Methods						X
WMBA 504 Managerial Economics						X
WMBA 505 Management & Organizational Behavior	X	X	X			X
WMBA 506 Marketing Concepts and Strategies				X		X
WMBA 507 Managerial Finance						X
WBMA 509 Management of IT		X				X
WMBA 510 Management of Global Enterprise				X		X
WMBA 560 Ethical Leadership	X		X			X
WMBA 562 Management Policy and Strategy					X	

The table above shows the progression of courses in the MBA program. Each outcome for the program is listed. Places where the outcomes are emphasized have an 'X' character.

GRADUATE PROGRAM METHODS

The MBA program uses three primary approaches to assess outcomes. Each approach is demonstrated in the following sections by showing a specific example. Assessment with Faculty Rubrics Leadership in this MBA program is defined as the "ability to demonstrate leadership competencies." It comprises the following specific outcomes: First, to develop and enhance existing leadership strengths in oneself and others and to acquire relevant, new leadership skills (Application, Synthesis, Evaluation) Second, to determine and select the most effective leadership approach after examining the context, the people, and the organization (Synthesis, Evaluation) Third, to assess the ability to lead a team towards the successful completion of goals (Evaluation) Leadership is primarily assessed in the WMBA 505 course, the initial core course in the program. One of the assignments used to assess student leadership is a 60-140 page personal portfolio. It is generated over a number of weeks, and includes personal reflections, student 'stories' (pertaining to course subjects) and a 100-day leadership implementation plan. An example from the portfolio assessment can be seen in the following tables. The two faculty teaching WMBA 505 use the rubric below to grade every assignment (Table 2). This rubric is used for all sections offered.

For each section, professors generate the table below to demonstrate student growth from the pre-course assignment to the final project (due on the last week of class). This table demonstrates the increase on satisfactory completion of the learning outcomes from the initial assignment to the final assignment Through close collaboration, the two professors formulated a coherent quality standard in the different sections of the course. During the initial development of the assignment, other faculty members were consulted on both the assignment and the grading standards. Assessment Through Co-teaching with Writing Faculty Communication is defined as the "ability to communicate effectively." This learning outcome centers on the following: First, to demonstrate the application of effective communication skills in speaking, writing, and using electronic media. (Application, Analysis). Second, ability to express one's position succinctly, logically, and persuasively (Synthesis). Third, to apply communication strategies to improve team effectiveness (Application, Analysis). Fourth, to apply communication skills across diverse contexts and environments (Application, Analysis, Synthesis)

Table 2: Rubric Used to Assess Portfolio Assignment in an MBA Course

Assessment Criteria/ Dimension	Exceeds the Standard	Meets the Standard	Doesn't meet Standard	Max. Points
Organization and Presentation	Excellent Presentation with pertinent graphics/artifacts Org. like a Mini-book. Very Creative. 3	Good Presentation using appropriate documents and graphics 2	Portfolio seems like a bunch of disparate papers put together 1	3
Content Coverage	Very comprehensive and much beyond what is stated in the template 3	Full coverage of all the elements required 2	Missing assignments: does not include all the required information 1	3
Quality of 2 Key Assignments (Extra Credit)	A Based on Actual Grade/quality 3	B Based on Actual Grade/Quality 2	C Actual Grade/ Quality 0	3
Application of Leadership/ Ethics	Excellent integration of Leadership/ethics: Personal and Professional life 3	Good example of application of material 3	Shows no or very little application of material learned 1	3

The table above is a rubric used to assess a portfolio assignment in an MBA course. It was jointly created by 2 faculty, who then used it in all sections offered.

The two MBA 505 "Management and Organizational Behavior " faculty co-teach with writing faculty. Working together, the two instructors jointly administer pre- and post-tests, grade papers, and provide instruction. In the first term where faculty co-taught the course, the validated pre-test found that only 50% of students were writing at an acceptable graduate level. Each paper was also assessed by a minimum of 2 external writing professors to ensure valid and reliable scoring (with an inter-rater reliability of 80%). The assignment at that time consisted of a brief written description, in-class discussion, and a two-stage (proposal and final copy) process two interventions were then tested in the subsequent academic year. In the Fall term, the paper assignment was redesigned into a series of 6 assignments, supported by a number of in-class workshops. In the Spring, an additional writing professor was included and a number of additional one-on-one sessions were added. The external writing professors provide scoring validity. So far, the additional interventions have not brought significant improvement in average scores. While disappointing, the high degree of external validity provided by writing faculty provides a reliable way of testing interventions in coming terms. Assessing with Externally-Validated Simulations Integration in this MBA program is defined as the "ability to integrate strategies within overall organizational context." It entails the following: First, to identify salient features of complex situations and organizations and be able to recommend an effective change strategy (Synthesis). Second, ability to adapt strategic thinking creatively to address unpredictable situations and contexts (Analysis, Synthesis). Third, to demonstrate the ability to integrate and synthesize various functional areas and to assess their effectiveness in terms of achieving overall organizational goals/success (Synthesis, Evaluation)

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Table 3: Student Growth from Pre-course to Final Project

Assessment Criteria/ Dimensions	Exceeded the Standard	Met the Standard	Did not meet Standard
Pre-Class Assignment: Values to Vision Passion to Purpose	50%	42%	8%
Course-end Check point: Course Takeaways 100 Day Leadership Implementation Plan	75%	17%	8%

The table above shows progress by students from the pre-class assignment to the post-class assignment. It shows that students who initially met the standard at a basic level were able to improve their learning by the end of the course.

The two capstone faculty members use the CAPSIM business simulation to assess integration. This is a computer-based simulation emphasizing strategy and the alignment of all parts of a firm. It is team-based, and takes place over a series of simulated years (each taking one "turn" by the students for decision making). One of the advantages of a nationally normed simulation instead of an exit examination is that it provides greater motivation to students. For example, one of the nationally normed MBA exit exams was piloted for a single academic year. Unfortunately, the students did not care much about their scores. As a result, many simply raced through the exam without really trying to score well. While assigning a high point value to the exam results was tempting, the lack of alignment between the exam contents and the MBA curriculum made this unfair to students. The exam company also did not provide detailed results, but limited the six-hour in-class exam to a summary measure and 6 sub-measures.
Using a simulation to compete against other MBA students nationally provides a much more motivating experience for students. The task covers many of the same skills as the curriculum, and emphasizes a team-based decision-making approach similar to how most businesses work. Through a careful statistical analysis, it was determined that the sub-scores available in the simulation provide similar feedback to the nationally-normed ETS exam, and the practical nature of the exercises makes it a valuable learning experience (instead just a summative assessment exercise).

Undergraduate Program Assessment

The undergraduate program uses a core assessment committee and more tightly coordinated learning activities. The program consists of four majors: Management, Marketing, Fashion Marketing, and Accounting. All undergraduate students take twelve common core courses. The four majors are not assessed separately, but only as an overall business degree program. Unlike the graduate program, the undergraduate mapping of outcomes to courses is complex. The undergraduate program is designed to last 4 years (as opposed to a one-year MBA), and there is much more sequencing and longitudinal growth. Due to the program's comprehensiveness, there is also more variation from term to term. A greater number of instructors are used, and a larger number of offered sections must be coordinated.
The following table shows the key assessment points at which outcomes are introduced, developed, and mastered. Each outcome is assessed at an *introductory* level, *developmental* level, and *mastery* level. Please note that these outcomes are generally taught in every course; the following table indicates the key points at which the outcome is assessed by the committee. The table demonstrates the longitudinal growth expected by students in the program.

Undergraduate Learning Methods

The undergraduate assessment process initially used a similar assessment model. However, the increased number of outcomes, courses, and faculty made coordination difficult. To remedy this model, a committee drives all assessment-related activity. This multi-disciplinary group is composed of faculty from each program. After developing and simplifying the program learning outcomes, the group created a series of benchmarked assignments used in all core courses. Throughout each semester, the committee coordinates with faculty teaching these courses. Faculty members are responsible for ensuring that all student work for each of the key assignments is submitted to the university course management system (Moodle). Faculty members are also responsible for using the provided standardized rubrics in Moodle.
At the end of each semester, the committee reviews all submitted work in Moodle. They then create a report focusing on two elements: course-by-course analysis, and longitudinal analysis. The following sections provide two examples of these analyses.

Committee Course Analysis

For each core course, the committee examines all submitted work and answers the following questions. First, assignment/rubric: Did the faculty use the required assignment, collect student work, and grade using the provided rubric? Did they provide overall and sub-scale scores? Second, usage of the

University's online submission source usage (Moodle): Did the faculty use the online submission source, for posting files, collecting student work, and for online grading? Third, learning outcome: Did students demonstrate learning in the appropriate learning outcome? How does that compare to work in previous terms and in similar sections?

Table 5: Assessment Responsibilities for the Undergraduate Program

	Communication	**Ethics**	**Global**	**Leadership**
MGMT 100 Intro. to Business	Introduce		Introduce	Introduce
MGMT 110 Legal		Introduce		
ACCT 205 Act. I				
ACCT 206 Act. II				
MRKT 301 Marketing		Develop	Develop	
MGMT 326 Mgmt. & Org. Behavior	Develop		Develop	Develop
MGMT 336 IT	Develop			
MGMT 350 Ethics		Develop		Develop
FINA 360 Financial Management	Develop	Develop		
MGMT 400 Operations Management				
MGMT 461 Leadership		Master		Master
MGMT 483 Capstone	Master		Master	

The table above shows the progression of courses in the BBA program. Each outcome for the program is listed. Places where the outcomes are emphasized are shown as "introduce," "develop," or "master" to show the expected level of student performance.

Assessment of each course is qualitative, rather than quantitative. Individual faculty members are all required to use rubrics, but the overall assessment program relies upon the expert opinion of the committee members. As an example, the marketing course focuses on assessing ethics and global outcomes. The key benchmark assignment requires students to analyze a global brand. Students individually write a paper discussing variations in product, price, place, and promotion (the 4 Ps of marketing). They then are responsible for creating a marketing plan that contains an analysis of cultural reasons for different marketing approaches. The standardized rubric below is used to grade each assignment. It is used by all faculty teaching the core marketing course.

Because 4-6 sections of this course are offered each term, it requires coordination by the department offering the course. While some faculty experience a tough learning curve using the course management system, overall, the use of a central repository minimizes the work of the assessment committee. Committee Longitudinal Analysis Beyond just evaluating work done in individual courses, the assessment committee also looks at the progression of student work from the freshman to the senior level.

This answers questions of alignment and value-added nature. One outcome that is regularly assessed is communication. This is broken into written and verbal aspects. For written communication, the assessment committee pulls a sample of student work from the "Introduction to Management" freshman course, a junior "Management of Organizational Behavior" course, and the senior "Leadership" course.

By comparing each sample, the committee can see growth over time and assess weaknesses. Improving written communication requires more work than the simpler co-teaching method used by the MBA program. Because there are so many more undergraduate students and faculty, it would be cost-prohibitive to co-teach each of these courses. As a result, a semester-long Faculty Learning Community is being conducted to improve and align business faculty's written communication instruction. One of the key attributes of this approach is that is focuses on education rather than assessment. Assessment is simply the process of curriculum management in a scientific manner; improving instruction and faculty knowledge leads to improved assessable outcomes. Focusing on the education of faculty in a low-stress, highly-collaborative, and bottom-up driven process allows better buy-in and less of the top-down "we have to do X" attitude that often is driven by accreditation requirements.

Table 6: Rubric used to assess globalism assignment in marketing course

Rubric	Beginner: Does Not Meet Standard Points	Novice: Nearly Meets Standard Points	Proficient: Meets Standard Points	Advanced: Exceeds Standard points
Identification of Global/Cultural Factors	No or incomplete identification of some or all of the following relevant cultural factors	Some identification of most of the relevant factors	Clear identification of relevant factors	Detailed identification of all relevant factors
Analysis of Marketing Mix and Cultural Factors	No analysis of impact of relevant cultural issues; Erroneous analysis of impact	Some analysis of impact of cultural factors: Some inaccuracies in analysis	Clear analysis of impact of cultural factors; Accurate analysis of impact	Detailed and accurate analysis of impact of relevant cultural factors
Application of Key Marketing Concepts to the Situation	No application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; Incorrect conclusions or recommendations made	Some application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; weak conclusions or recommendations made	Clear application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; Valid conclusions and good recommendations given	Comprehensive application of theory/concepts to specific marketing situation; Strong conclusions made" creative recommendations given

The table above is a rubric used to assess a globalism assignment in an marketing course. It was jointly created by the marketing faculty, who use it in all sections offered.

For oral communication, faculty taped student presentations in the "Introduction to Business" freshman course, the junior "Management of IT" course, and in the senior capstone course. This provides a longitudinal view of student growth over time. Simply viewing a sample of student presentations provides highly visible evidence of learning. In order to move from a more qualitative approach, faculty are planning on running another faculty learning community to jointly work with public speaking faculty. This should help with standard approaches to developing this skill. Taping presentations with digital camcorders is relatively easy and low-cost, and provides direct evidence for assessment. In future terms, the committee plans on having a number of courses video-taped for assessment purposes. The courses taped should vary each term. This will allow the assessment committee to conduct a rolling view of all courses over a multi-year assessment cycle.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a case study of a small university's two contrasting assessment programs. The methods used are able to satisfy the two conflicting goals of assessment. External quality assurance is developed through the use of an externally validated case simulation. Internal improvement goals are met through the use of faculty-driven assessments. Longitudinal data is collected and assessed by a committee, and all results are regularly reported to stakeholders. The major lesson learned from this study is that there is no one single "right" way to do assessment. Depending on local conditions, a variety of approaches may all satisfy a program's needs. Using a variety of methods driven and developed by individual faculty members can lead to a stronger 'bottom-up' approach to quality assurance. Because this is a single case study, it has some limitations. The research was conducted at a small business school, meaning that the results may not be generalizable to larger schools or different majors. Because this project used a qualitative process, the results may not be easy to compare to other situations. In future work, we plan to develop more assessment case studies. These studies should help decision makers by providing concrete examples of successful assessment programs. We hope that the results of this study are useful to other schools looking to develop their assessment programs. The wide range of tactics and strategies available today can be overwhelming, but this case provides a concrete example for broader emulation.

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BIOGRAPHY

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